

TRACE THE SMELL

Incense, called *heung* in Cantonese, literally means "fragrance". It is the same Chinese character as the one used in Hong Kong, or "Fragrant Harbour". Legend has it that Hong Kong derived its name from the vast quantities of incense it harvested and exported as far away as Arabia for hundreds of years. The first "fragrant harbour" was a bay near Aberdeen, from where incense was shipped out, until the British arrived and named the entire territory after it. Its bark, wood and leaves are used to make incense, but the incense tree - officially known as *Aquilaria sinensis* - is also used in traditional Chinese medicine. Up to 60 per cent of the incense sold over the last 10 years has been the environmentally friendly variety, a vendor says. The elderly believe incense has to be smelly and smoky enough for their ancestors to enjoy a hearty meal - the smoke is food for them, the belief goes. Most sticks of incense burn for about half an hour. Every fragrant inch adds about 5 minutes to the burning time.

